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RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

[on the report of the Second Committee (A/50/619)]

50/120. Triennial policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolutions 44/211 of 22 December 1989 and 47/199 of 22 December 1992, as well as other relevant resolutions,

Reaffirming that operational activities for development within the United Nations system have a critical and unique role to play in enabling developing countries to continue to take a lead role in the management of their own development process,

Bearing in mind that the effectiveness of operational activities should be measured by their impact on the sustained economic growth and sustainable development of developing countries,

Stressing that national plans and priorities constitute the only viable frame of reference for the national programming of operational activities for development within the United Nations system, and that programmes should be based on such development plans and priorities, and should therefore be country-driven,

Also stressing in that context the need to take into account the outcomes and commitments of relevant United Nations conferences, as well as the individual mandates and complementarities of the organizations and bodies of the United Nations development system, bearing in mind the need to avoid duplication,

Further stressing that the fundamental characteristics of the operational activities of the United Nations system should be, inter alia, their universal, voluntary and grant nature, their neutrality and their

multilateralism, as well as their ability to respond to the needs of developing countries in a flexible manner, and that the operational activities of the United Nations system are carried out for the benefit of the developing countries, at the request of those countries and in accordance with their own policies and priorities for development,

Recognizing the urgent and specific needs of the low-income countries, in particular the least developed countries,

Noting the progress that has been achieved in a number of areas in the implementation of its resolution 47/199, while stressing the need for individual organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, as well as coordination mechanisms of the United Nations system, to continue to work towards the full and coordinated implementation of that resolution,

Also recognizing that the United Nations development system should take into account the specific needs and requirements of the countries with economies in transition and other recipient countries,

Recalling that the General Assembly is the highest intergovernmental mechanism for the formulation and appraisal of policy matters relating to the economic, social and related fields, in accordance with Chapter IX of the Charter of the United Nations, and that the functions and powers of the Economic and Social Council are provided for in Chapters IX and X of the Charter and are elaborated in relevant Assembly resolutions, including resolutions 45/264 of 13 May 1991 and 48/162 of 20 December 1993, in which the Assembly defined the relationship between the Assembly, the Council and the executive boards of the funds and programmes, in particular the Council function of overall guidance and coordination of the operational activities for development of the United Nations system,

1. Takes note of the report of the Secretary-General on the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system 1/ and welcomes its user-friendly format;

2. Reaffirms its resolution 47/199 and stresses the need to implement fully all the elements of that resolution in a coherent manner, keeping in mind their interlinkages;

3. Endorses Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/51 of 28 July 1995 on overall guidance on operational activities for development to the United Nations funds and programmes;

4. Notes with regret that, although significant progress has already been made on the restructuring and rationalization of the governance and functioning of the United Nations development funds and programmes, there has not been, as part of the overall reform process, any substantial increase in resources for operational activities for development on a predictable, continuous and assured basis, nor have the consultations on prospective new modalities for financing reached a conclusion;

5. Strongly reaffirms that the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the operational activities of the United Nations system must be enhanced

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1/ A/50/202-E/1995/76.

by, inter alia, a substantial increase in their funding on a predictable, continuous and assured basis, commensurate with the increasing needs of developing countries, as well as through the full implementation of resolutions 47/199 and 48/162;

6. Urges developed countries, in particular those countries whose overall performance is not commensurate with their capacity, taking into account established official development assistance targets, including targets established at the Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries 2/ and their current levels of contribution, to increase substantially their official development assistance, including contributions to the operational activities of the United Nations system;

7. Notes with appreciation the sustained contributions of many donors and recipient countries to the operational activities for development in a spirit of partnership;

8. Expresses serious concern at the persistent insufficiency of resources for the operational development activities of the United Nations, in particular the decline in contributions to core resources;

9. Stresses the need for a substantial increase in resources for operational activities for development on a predictable, continuous and assured basis, commensurate with the increasing needs of developing countries;

10. Decides that intensified consultations and negotiations on prospective new specific modalities for financing operational activities for development on a predictable, continuous and assured basis, in accordance with paragraphs 31 to 34 of annex I to resolution 48/162 on the restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic and social fields, should lead to an agreed outcome in the framework of the review process of that resolution;

11. Reaffirms the need for priority allocation of scarce grant resources to programmes and projects in low-income countries, particularly the least developed countries;

12. Emphasizes that recipient Governments have the primary responsibility for coordinating, on the basis of national strategies and priorities, all types of external assistance, including that provided by multilateral organizations, in order to integrate effectively such assistance into their development process;

13. Urges the members of the United Nations development system to continue to develop an agreed division of responsibility, in accordance with their respective mandates, under the coordination of Governments as well as greater complementarity in their respective roles at the field level in response to the needs and priorities of recipient countries;

14. Stresses the need for the United Nations system to take full account of the interests and concerns of all recipient countries, and, in that context, stresses the need for it to give serious consideration to ways of

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2/ See Report of the Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, Paris, 3-14 September 1990 (A/CONF.147/18), part one.

ensuring a more coherent response by the system to the national plans and priorities of recipient Governments;

15. Also stresses the need for all organizations of the United Nations development system to focus their efforts at the field level on priority areas, in accordance with the priorities identified by recipient countries and the mandates, mission statements and relevant decisions of their governing bodies, in order to avoid duplication and enhance the complementarity and impact of their work;

16. Further stresses that, in the context of the reform of the United Nations Secretariat and the restructuring and revitalization of the intergovernmental process, the mandates of the separate sectoral and specialized entities, funds, programmes and specialized agencies should be respected and enhanced, taking into account their complementarities;

17. Reaffirms that the country strategy note remains a voluntary initiative of recipient countries that should be formulated by interested recipient countries in accordance with their development plans and priorities, with the assistance of and in cooperation with the United Nations system under the leadership of the resident coordinator, in all recipient countries where the Government so decides;

18. Decides that, where in place, the country strategy note should be the common framework for country programmes of United Nations system organizations and for programming, monitoring and evaluating United Nations system activities in such countries, and that the country strategy note should outline the United Nations system contribution, including, where appropriate, an indication of the level of resources needed to meet the requirements therein;

19. Requests the Secretary-General, in consultation with interested Member States and in order to be able to respond more effectively to the needs of recipient countries, to undertake further work on:

(a) Broad common guidelines, with the aim of promoting greater consistency and clarity in the United Nations system contribution to country strategy notes;

(b) Enhancing its operational relevance by ensuring that the development of individual country programmes takes fully into account the framework provided by the country strategy note, where it exists, so as to promote an agreed division of responsibility within the United Nations system in accordance with paragraph 13 of the present resolution;

(c) Promoting the exchange of experiences gained in producing country strategy notes among recipient countries;

20. Requests the Secretary-General, in consultation with Member States and United Nations organizations, to consider ways of enhancing the coordination of United Nations development activities at the regional and subregional levels, including ways of enhancing the role of the regional commissions and of promoting the national ownership of regional programmes;

21. Stresses that the United Nations system, where requested by interested Governments, should support the establishment of the forums and

mechanisms that facilitate and guide policy dialogue among the partners in the development process, primarily in order to ensure that their programmes are integrated with national plans and strategies;

22. Decides that the objective of capacity-building and its sustainability should continue to be an essential part of the operational activities of the United Nations system at the country level, with the aim of integrating their activities and providing support to efforts to strengthen national capacities in the fields of, inter alia, policy and programme formulation, development management, planning, implementation, coordination, monitoring and review;

23. Recalls the importance of accountability as well as of simplifying reporting requirements, which should be in line with national systems;

24. Decides that, where Governments so desire, the United Nations system should be ready to engage in providing an enabling environment to strengthen the capacity of civil societies and national non-governmental organizations that are involved in development activities, in accordance with national priorities;

25. Also decides that the United Nations system should use, to the fullest extent possible, available national expertise and indigenous technologies;

26. Calls for further work on the development of common guidelines at the field level for the recruitment, training and remuneration of national project personnel, including national consultants in the formulation and implementation of development projects and programmes supported by the United Nations development system in order to enhance the coherence of the system;

27. Decides that the United Nations development system should continue to work on promoting a common understanding and the operationalization of capacity-building concepts, as well as on ways of enhancing the sustainability of capacity-building;

28. Also decides that the United Nations development system should continue to work on improving the definition and guidelines for national execution and the programme approach;

29. Requests the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system to undertake efforts in the context of national execution and capacity-building to enhance the absorptive capacity in developing countries, in particular in the least developed countries and Africa, and to assist similar efforts undertaken by those countries;

30. Stresses the important role of the specialized agencies of the United Nations system in transferring and facilitating the necessary technical and substantive expertise to support the national execution of United Nations-funded programmes and projects, and invites the Secretary-General, in collaboration with the heads of specialized agencies, to inform the Economic and Social Council of the measures taken by those specialized agencies in response to General Assembly resolution 47/199, in particular as regards national execution;

31. Also stresses that the governing bodies of all funds, programmes and specialized agencies should make further progress in order to ensure that the prescribed limits on field-level authority for cancelling, modifying and adding activities within approved programmes and shifting resources within approved budget lines of individual components of a programme and among components of a programme, with the approval of national authorities, should be expanded to become equal and uniform, to the maximum extent possible, in the context of enhanced accountability;

32. Recognizes that monitoring and evaluation processes, including joint evaluations, should continue to be nationally led, and that the United Nations system should therefore support, where requested by Governments, the strengthening of national evaluation capacities;

33. Also recognizes in that context the need to strengthen capacities to perform both effective programme, project and financial monitoring and impact evaluations of operational activities funded by the United Nations;

34. Requests the United Nations system to strengthen its efforts, in consultation with recipient countries, to ensure that:

(a) Monitoring is carried out in a way that ensures the timely identification of problems and effective remedial action;

(b) Organizations of the United Nations system, operating at the country level, coordinate their periodic programme reviews and evaluations;

(c) The lessons learned from both monitoring and evaluation exercises are systematically applied into programming processes at the operational level, and that responsibility for such application is clearly assigned;

(d) Evaluation criteria are built into all projects and programmes at their design stage, bearing in mind the need for adequate training;

35. Underlines the importance of promoting, under the leadership of Governments, greater collaboration on issues relating to evaluation among recipient Governments, the United Nations development system and relevant development partners at the country level;

36. Requests the Secretary-General to make the resident coordinator system more participatory in its functioning at the field level by, inter alia, making greater use of thematic groups and adopting a more consultative approach;

37. Also requests the Secretary-General to:

(a) Identify ways of encouraging wider participation in the pool of candidates for resident coordinator positions;

(b) Promote greater governmental involvement in the selection process for resident coordinators, in particular by ensuring that national Governments are consulted before the post profile for resident coordinators is passed to the Joint Consultative Group on Policies, and keeping up to date the selection criteria for resident coordinators and, through the respective executive heads, for senior representatives of United Nations agencies in the field, bearing in mind the specific circumstances of individual countries;

(c) Develop common guidelines for staff performance appraisal for the funds and programmes, including ways of assessing the contribution of staff members to United Nations system coordination;

(d) Urge all members of the United Nations development system to give clear guidance and direction to their country representatives to promote the effective functioning of the resident coordinator system;

(e) Promote training in the areas of team-building and interpersonal skills;

38. Invites the United Nations system, including the funds and programmes, specialized agencies and the Secretariat, to provide, as appropriate, support to the resident coordinator system;

39. Reaffirms that resident coordinators, in full consultation with national Governments, should facilitate a coherent and coordinated United Nations follow-up to major international conferences at the field level;

40. Decides that in order to promote coordination and a better division of labour resident coordinators should, at an early stage of formulation, be informed of planned programme activities of the United Nations agencies, funds, programmes and bodies;

41. Also decides that the field-level committees organized by the United Nations system country team, which were established in accordance with paragraph 40 of General Assembly resolution 47/199, should review substantive activities - including draft country programmes, sectoral programmes and projects - prior to their approval by individual organizations, and should exchange experience acquired, on the understanding that the result of the work of the review committee should be submitted to national Governments for final approval through the national focal points;

42. Reaffirms the need to enhance the responsibility and authority of resident coordinators for the planning and coordination of programmes, as well as to allow them to propose, in full consultation with Governments, to the heads of the funds, programmes and specialized agencies, the amendment of country programmes and major projects and programmes, where required, in order to bring them into line with country strategy notes;

43. Requests the Secretary-General and the United Nations development system to take the need for gender balance fully into account when making appointments, including at the senior level and in the field, in accordance with relevant General Assembly resolutions;

44. Requests the Joint Consultative Group on Policies and, to the maximum extent possible, the specialized agencies, to raise substantially the target for achieving common premises on the basis of cost-benefit analysis and avoiding an increased burden on host countries;

45. Calls for further simplification and harmonization of rules of procedure used by the United Nations development system in its operational activities, in particular by the promotion of greater consistency in the presentation of budgets at the headquarters level, as well as in sharing administrative systems and services in the field, where possible, and in developing common databases, in consultation with national Governments;

46. Urges the members of the United Nations development system to adopt a more collaborative approach in preparing reports at all levels;

47. Requests the Secretary-General to promote the creation or further development of common guidelines on procedures relating to, inter alia, programme components and project formulation, appraisal, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and administration, in fulfilment of paragraph 33 of General Assembly resolution 47/199;

48. Takes note of Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/50 of 28 July 1995, in which the Council decided that the high-level meeting of the operational activities segment of its substantive session of 1996 should focus on strengthening collaboration between the United Nations development system and the Bretton Woods institutions in the area of social and economic development at all levels, including the field level;

49. Takes note of the mission statement of the World Food Programme and the decision of the executive boards of the United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund and of the United Nations Children's Fund to establish mission statements for their respective organizations;

50. Emphasizes the importance of disseminating the experience of effective and efficient cooperation with the United Nations development system, inter alia, through interregional projects of technical cooperation, and urges the United Nations system to give support to such activities;

51. Calls upon the United Nations system, in implementing the present resolution, to bear in mind the specific requirements of the continuum from humanitarian assistance through rehabilitation to development;

52. Requests the Secretary-General, after consultations with the funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations system, to present to the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1996 an appropriate management process containing clear guidelines, targets, benchmarks and time-frames for the full implementation of the present resolution;

53. Invites the Economic and Social Council, during the operational activities segment of its substantive sessions of 1996 and 1997, to examine the operational activities of the United Nations system with a view to ensuring the full implementation of the present resolution;

54. Also invites the Economic and Social Council, at its substantive session of 1996, to consider, inter alia, the issues of harmonization and administrative services, common premises and monitoring and evaluation, and, at its substantive session of 1997, to consider, inter alia, capacity-building, field and regional-level coordination, and resources, on the basis of progress reports by the Secretary-General, including appropriate recommendations;

55. Reaffirms that the governing bodies of the funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations system should take appropriate action for the full implementation of the present resolution, and requests the executive heads of those funds, programmes and specialized agencies, bearing in mind paragraph 46 of the present resolution, to submit a yearly progress report to their governing bodies on measures taken and envisaged for the

implementation of the present resolution, as well as appropriate recommendations;

56. Decides that, as an integral part of the next comprehensive triennial policy review, there should be, in consultation with Member States, an evaluation of the impact of operational activities for development, and requests the Secretary-General to submit to the Economic and Social Council at its substantive sessions of 1996 and 1997 information on progress in that regard;

57. Requests the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session, through the Economic and Social Council, a comprehensive analysis of the implementation of the present resolution in the context of the triennial policy review, and to make appropriate recommendations.

96th plenary meeting
20 December 1995